

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 AID-05 TRSE-00
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AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 2985

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, PINT, EAID, BG, BM
SUBJ: IMPACT OF BURMESE REFUGEES ON BDG

REF: DACCA 2901

1. INFLUX INTO CHITTAGONG AREA OF WHAT NOW AMOUNTS TO ABOUT 100,000 REFUGEES FROM BURMA, WITH LITTLE OR NO PROSPECT THAT THEY CAN ALL OR ALMOST ALL RETURN, PUTS BEFORE BDG A NUMBER OF IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ON WHICH IT MUST SOON TAKE DECISIONS. SITUATION FOR REFUGEES WILL, OF COURSE, BE UNCOMFORTABLE AND THE DISCOMFORT WILL INCREASE IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AS HEAVY MONSOON RAINS (WE ALREADY HAVE PRE-MONSOON SHOWERS AND STORMS) STRIKE BANGLADESH.

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2. WE ARE SENDING A SEPARATE MESSAGE ON BDG REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE FROM PRIVATE VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES. HOWEVER, BDG MUST FACE QUESTION OF TERM AND TYPE OF ASSISTANCE WHICH IT WILL REQUIRE. ARE REFUGEES TO BE ASSISTED ONLY ON A TEMPORARY BASIS WITH A MINIMUM STANDARD OF FOOD, CLOTHING, HOUSING AND MEDICAL

FACILITIES AS A HOLDING ACTION PENDING RETURN TO BURMA?
OR, MUST BDG CONSIDER LONGER RANGE ASSISTANCE IN THE
SENSE OF RESETTLEMENT?

3. THESE QUESTIONS HINGE ON BDG'S APPRECIATION OF THE
SITUATION FROM A PRACTICAL SENSE RATHER THAN FROM THE
RHETORICAL STANCE WHICH HAS PREVAILED SO FAR. BDG MUST
DECIDE WHETHER IT IS REASONABLE TO EXPECT THAT BURMA
WOULD PERMIT REFUGEES BACK INTO THE ARAKAN, OR,

PERHAPS A MAJOR PORTION OF THEM WHO CAN ESTABLISH THAT
THE FAMILIES TO WHICH THEY BELONG HAVE INDEED BEEN IN BURMA
FOR A SUFFICIENT TIME TO BE SEEN AS BONA FIDE RESIDENTS
OF THAT COUNTRY.

4. BANGLADESH IS ON RECORD AS "DEMANDING" THE RETURN OF
THE REFUGEES AND BURMA, SO FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, SEEMS
NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT THEM. THIS POSES THE BDG WITH
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS. CAN BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS PERSUADE
THE BURMESE TO ACCEPT SOME OR ALL AND AT THE SAME TIME
ASSURE BANGLADESH THAT A REPETITION WILL NOT TAKE PLACE IN
FUTURE YEARS? WILL THE BANGLADESHIS DECIDE TO INTER-
NATIONALIZE THE ISSUE? THERE ALREADY HAS BEEN SOME SUPPORT
FROM ISLAMIC BODIES, BUT THIS COULD BE EXPANDED BY
A REFERENCE TO UNITED NATIONS ORGANS. THE ULTIMATE
ALTERNATIVE WOULD, OF COURSE, BE ARMED CONFLICT, ALTHOUGH
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THIS SEEMS UNLIKELY AS A PRACTICAL SOLUTION. ANOTHER
ALTERNATIVE, AND ONE WHICH MIGHT APPEAL TO THE MORE
REACTIONARY ISLAMIC ELEMENTS IN BANGLADESH, WOULD BE
THE DRIVING OUT INTO BURMA OF THE MAGH COMMUNITY IN
BANGLADESH AND THE RESETTLEMENT OF THE REFUGEES ON THEIR
LANDS

5. BANGLADESH IS IN THE MIDST OF AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN
WHICH PRESIDENT ZIA IS ONE OF THE TWO MAJOR CANDIDATES.
IT IS CLEAR THAT HE WILL NOT WISH TO BE SEEN AS (OR BE
ACCUSED OF BEING) "SOFT" ON THE REFUGEE QUESTION. THIS
CREATES THE DANGER THAT PRECIPITATE ACTION MIGHT BE UNDER-
TAKEN BY BANGLADESH.

6. WE DO NOT YET HAVE THE ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS AND,
FOR SOME, ARE NOT LIKELY TO HEM UNTIL AFTER THE EVENT.
WE WOULD EXPECT ZIA TO CONTINUE TO INSIST THAT THE REFUGEES
RETURN WHENCE THEY CAME AND THAT BURMA AGREE TO THIS.
WE THINK IT NOT AT ALL UNLIKELY THAT BANGLADESH WILL ATTEMPT
TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE ISSUE AND TO DRUM UP ADDITIONAL
ISLAMIC SUPPORT (LIBYA, USUALLY A BETE NOIRE HERE, HAS BEEN
MENTIONED AS A POTENTIAL MEDDLER). WE THINK, FOR THE MOMENT,

THE CONFLICT OPTION IS LESS LIKELY BUT CANNOT RULE OUT
ACTION AGAINST THE MAGHS ALTHOUGH PRESUMABLY THE
GOVERNMENT COULD STOP SUCH A COURSE IF IT WISHED TO. SHORT
TERM ASSISTANCE HAS BEEN REQUESTED (SEE DACCA 2984) , BUT
RESETTLEMENT HELP MAY EVENTUALLY BE REQUIRED. ZIA, HOWEVER,
WILL BE COMPELLED BY THE ELECTION REALITIES TO APPEAR
TOUGH, AND RHETORIC DEVOID OF PRACTICALITIES IS LIKELY
TO RULE HERE FOR THE NEAR TERM FUTURE.
SCHNEIDER

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